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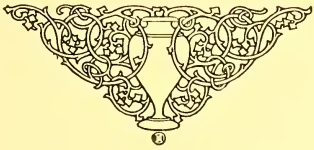
MEMORIAL CUSTOMS
Ancient and Modern

THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

MEMORIAL CUSTOMS

ANCIENT & MODERN



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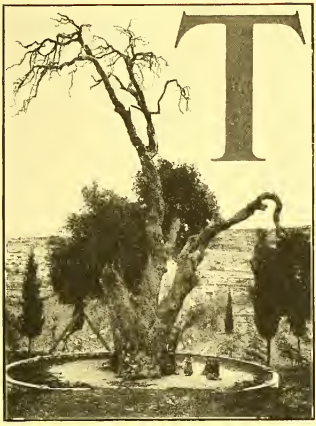

THE TREE OF ABRAHAM—HEBRON

THERE is an interesting account in Genesis which has been said by historians to be the first record of the transfer of land for an established burial place for the dead in the world, if not the first actual record of a particular land transaction for any purpose. When Abraham was sojourning in Canaan, and Sarah, his wife, died, he applied to Ephron, the son of Zohar, to purchase a field from him, which he desired "for a possession of a burying place among you." And in payment therefor, according to Genesis, he "weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named. Four hundred shekels of silver, current money, with the merchants, and the field and the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all the borders round about, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession of a burying place."

And, as recorded, Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. There Sarah was buried and afterwards also Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Rebekah and Leah, and undoubtedly numerous of their descendants. And this first historic cemetery, which was located outside the gates of Hebron, then the most important city in the land of Canaan, has ever since been regarded as a place of sacred interest. An ancient tree, the "Tree of Abraham," so many centuries old that it is asserted to have existed in the time of the great Father of Israel himself and to have shaded him, and possibly his grave, is still standing there and carefully protected.

THE SITE OF ABRAHAM'S BURIAL FIELD AND CAVE OF MACPHELAH —HEBRON

ANCIENT AND MODERN

FROM the beginning of the human race all the tribes and nations of the earth, whether in the reverent way of Abraham or not, have evinced in one form or another earnest solicitude for their dead. According to the conditions of their lives and the character of their civilization, this universal human sentiment has found expression in many peculiar ways; but, invariably in proportion as the immortal spirit of man has risen up to look with hope beyond the grave, care for the dead has assumed forms of inspiring symbolism or of refined and enduring tokens of loving remembrance.

The ceremonials of grief or solicitude of uncivilized peoples are invariably distorted, from a deep and mysterious fear of the dead, and because of their many bewildering superstitions. Primitive races express their grief with utter abandonment to wild and primitive emotions: tearing their hair, wringing their hands, daubing their faces, even sometimes gashing their bodies in frenzy, while at the same time they display solicitude and affection for the dead by placing near them articles of daily use or comfort—food, drink, implements of war, or the like—for use in their mysterious journey. Wives and slaves have been sacrificed by some for the use of the dead in the next world; and this custom at one

period prevailed among most nations of the earth—Asia, Africa, and even in America among the aborigines—and it still exists among some savage peoples. The Dahomeyites and Fijians, it is said, at intervals, long after a funeral, kill slaves, whose souls are supposed to go to the dead with messages from the living. In Japan, at one time, it was the custom for numbers of slaves to commit harikari that they might go with their masters; and treasures were also buried with the dead for their use.

In Kamchatka special dogs are kept to consume the dead, in the belief that those who are eaten by dogs here will drive fine dogs to their sleighs in the other world.

Some tribes of the ancient Syrians are said to have eaten their own dead. At Dahomey there is authority for the statement that the bodies of persons meeting violent death, as by lightning, are not buried, but are hacked to pieces and eaten by priests, though it is believed they do not actually eat, but make believe, which is probably a survival of what was once a reality.

The Parsees place their dead on great round towers, called Towers of Silence, which are built and maintained for the purpose, there to be eaten by vultures, who make their abode among the accumulated bones.

Burial under the ground or in caves and tombs has always been the most common form of disposition

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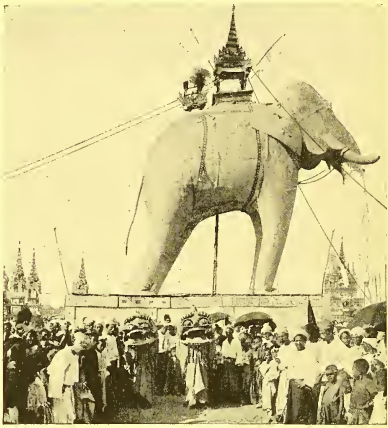
A PARSEE "TOWER OF SILENCE"

of the dead. Among the variations of early burial customs was that of burning the dead and burying the ashes, or of embalming the bodies, or drying them in trees or upon artificial scaffolds before burial.

The Egyptians, believing the soul would again re-enter the body, took great care always to preserve the body, by an art long since forgotten, but by which their mummies have been preserved until now, many thousands of years later, mute reminders, with their pyramids and extravagant tombs, of a misguided age, struggling by futile material means for immortality. Such tombs were only possible for kings or the very rich, and there were great sand pits and trenches in which the ordinary dead were buried.

MEMORIAL CUSTOMS

Customs differ as to the positions of bodies in the grave, some lying, some sitting; but with a remarkable uniformity, due to Solar Symbolism, heads have been placed either to the East or to the West, according as the dead were thought of in connec-



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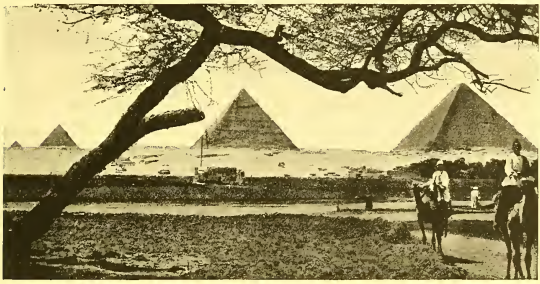
A FUNERAL CEREMONY IN BURMA

tion with sunrise, the supposed home of Deity, or otherwise.

Funeral feasts have prevailed extensively in many parts of the world, like our own anniversary dinners, to do honor to the dead and also often from the belief that the dead participate in the cheer. At

such times men have believed they communed with the dead and that their spirits were present with them.

In all ages despots have resorted to extreme extravagance of ceremonial and of monuments for their royal dead. It is said in building one of the pyramids, tombs of the vainglorious Pharaohs, the labor of



PYRAMIDS—TOMBS OF THE PHARAOHS

360,000 men was required for twenty years, and 2,000 men were engaged three years in transporting a single stone.

Herodotus says that the body of a Syrian king was laid, stretched upon a mattress, in the grave prepared for it, spears were fixed in the ground on either side of the corpse, and beams were stretched across above it, and covered with a thatching of osier twigs, to form a roof. In the open space around the

body of the king, they burned one of his concubines, first strangling her, and also his cupbearer, his cook, his groom, his lackey, his messenger, some of his horses, firstlings of all his other possessions, and some golden cups, for they used neither silver nor brass;

AN ARABIAN CEMETERY AT ALEXANDRIA

after this, they raised a great mound over his grave (to make it as tall as possible). Alexander the Great caused a tumulus to be heaped over the remains of his friend, Hephæstion, at the enormous cost of 1200 talents, a sum in excess of one million dollars.

Coming to more cultivated people, among the Greeks the custom of both cremation and burial

prevailed. The body, annointed, was crowned with flowers and clothed in fine raiment, usually white, and they made great funeral sacrifices.

The Roman ceremonials were similar. Burial was the earlier custom. Burning was not general until the Republic, but was universal under the Empire. The preparation of the body was elabo-

THE TOMB OF LAZARUS

rate, it being dressed in its best according to station, emperors in their royal robes and crowns.

Different colors have been adopted as badges of mourning; some families of the race have chosen black, others white, gray, yellow, crimson or purple. Some have buried at night-time and others by day.

From the beginning of the Christian era the rites of burial have been marked by great reverence, due

to belief in immortality. Under Christian influence cremation gradually disappeared in Europe and burial became universal. The funeral invariably took place by day, for, the Christian death being considered in the nature of a victory, it was meant to give the procession the aspect of triumph, for which reason participants bore palms and olive branches instead of cypress like the Romans.

Since the dawn of the Christian era, time has brought about many changes. In Rome the early Christians resorted to the catacombs with their dead, where, hidden under the ground, they held religious rites; and they took refuge in the secret passages of these same catacombs in times of persecution by the pagans. As religion spread throughout the Old World, the custom soon prevailed of burying the dead within the sacred precincts of the churches and cathedrals, the walls and pillars of which were covered with inscriptions and with masses of monumental sculpture, in honor of those whose remains were laid beneath their pavements. Soon these were filled up, and then the churches were fenced in and their yards became the places of sepulture.

YE OLDE CHURCHYARD

IN the early days of this country the people either buried their dead in family lots on their own estates, or else in the churchyards. The old churchyards are interesting relics wherever they remain to be seen, with their crude congestion of grave mounds, quaint and incongruous burial stones, and gnarled and ancient trees.

But as cities grew and the churchyards were filled, separate cemeteries were established as near by as possible, while the old methods of the churchyards were continued. Graves and burial stones, monuments, of every kind, continued to be crowded close together, and only such paths and driveways as were necessary were laid out through the tiers of lots and graves. Every individual lot owner, without regard to environment or harmony of design, located a monument or burial stone on each separate grave, enclosing the different lots with fences of various kinds or curbings, as though each lot had no relation to the rest. In consequence, the charms of nature were, if not altogether displaced, greatly marred, and costly monuments, works of exquisite art, are to be seen in

most of them, with perspectives smothered and their impressiveness and beauty disfigured by the discordant surroundings. Such congestion of monuments and tombs exists in places of burial throughout all the continents of the Old World—so-called "cities of the dead"—and in all of the older cemeteries of this country. And few, if any, of the old-time cemeteries were provided in any adequate way by their founders for their future preservation, being generally left to the inevitable ravages of time or to the uncertain disposition of later generations, and many of them have been totally destroyed. There is scarcely a city in the United States, as young as our country is, that has not experienced the destruction of one or more of its earlier cemeteries, or that has not some such dismal relics, and almost all cemeteries that were built in past generations, or inaugurated on plans of three or four decades ago, now show some deterioration or insufficiency.

IN FOREST HILL—MEMPHIS

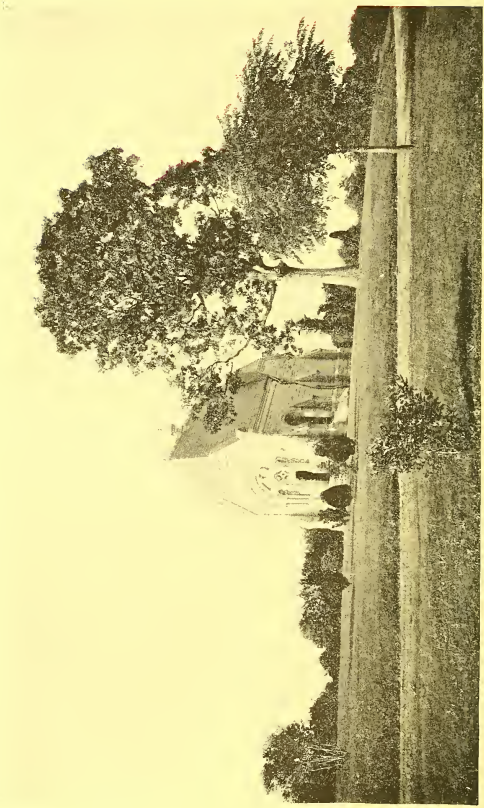
BUT about thirty years ago, an American idea, the rural or park-lawn cemetery, was conceived, and the most beautiful cemeteries in the world have been the result, such as Graceland, of Chicago; Spring Grove, of Cincinnati; Kensico, of New York; Forest Hill, of Memphis, and others; and the system has been adopted since by all the best of the old cemeteries of the larger cities that possessed sufficient acreage in developing the remaining portions of their grounds, and in such cemeteries as Woodlawn, of New York, Cave Hill, of Louisville, and many others, the great beauties of the modern park-lawn system are shown in remarkable contrast to the method originally pursued in the old parts of their grounds.

The location of the rural or park-lawn cemetery is selected for its adaptability and natural beauties, away from the city's clatter and dust and with land

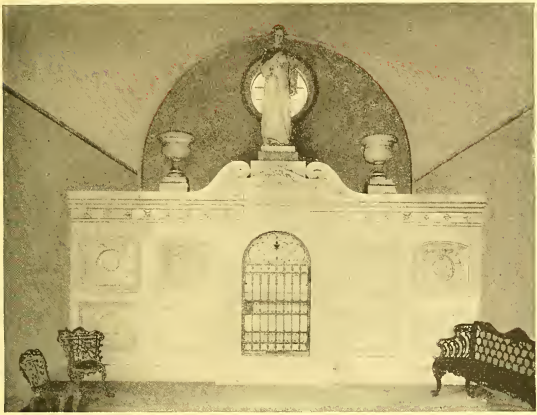
LANDSCAPE—FOREST HILL, MEMPHIS

IN FOREST HILL—MEMPHIS

enough for years to come. It is at the beginning laid out upon studied plans of a landscape architect, according to which its entire future development is made. All of its natural beauties are carefully preserved and accentuated by artistic cultivation and design. There are generous reservations, in every part, of shade and stretches of smooth lawn, dotted or framed with ornamental shrubs and flowers, where no burials will ever be allowed and the birds may always peacefully sing. All avenues are bordered by reservations of lawn with foliage shielding the lots and graves from exposure to the bare roadsides,



PUBLIC RECEIVING VAULT—FOREST HILL CEMETERY, MEMPHIS

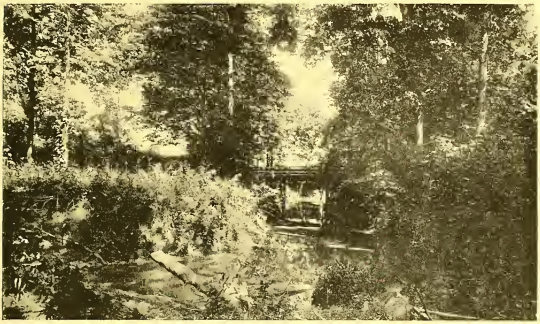


INTERIOR OF PUBLIC RECEIVING VAULT—FOREST HILL, MEMPHIS

and the walk-ways are of thick sod, mowed close and rolled down smooth and firm, on nearly an even grade with the lots, so that all the areas, except the drives, form continuous lawns, broken only by the monuments on the lots, the shaded reservations beyond and by groups of ornamental shrubs and flowers. Inconspicuous corner-stones sunk down to a level with the sod mark each lot, and there are no unsightly fences, or other lot enclosures. The location of all monuments and the planting of trees, shrubs and flowers are so guided and planned as to present from every point the most advantageous

THE ENTRANCE AND GATE LODGE—FOREST HILL, MEMPHIS

views and a general appearance of uninterrupted and harmonious arrangement. Coincident with the improved idea of cemetery development was the recognized duty to provide for permanent preservation and care of the grounds and of individual lots included, by the establishment at the beginning of

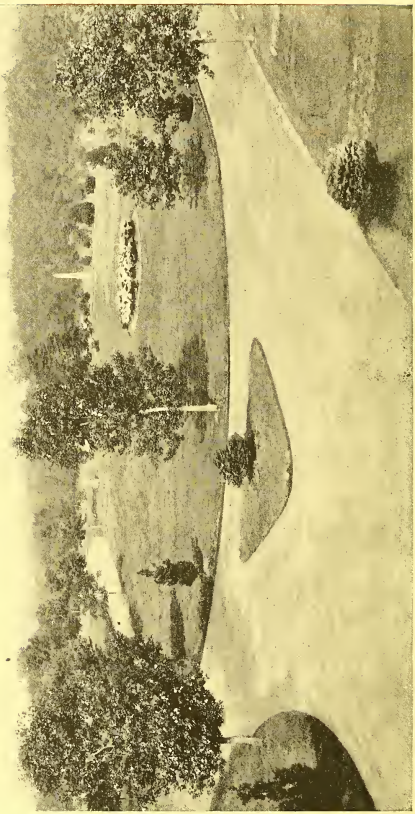


A RUSTIC VIEW—FOREST HILL, MEMPHIS

trusts sufficient and unalterable in the organic law, thereby profiting by the sad example of almost universal oversight or deficiency in this regard of other generations, so that all such organized cemeteries will remain beautiful places of public veneration and interest through centuries to come and after the exhaustion of their capacity for burials. Everything in the modern cemetery is planned to present and always preserve restful and pleasing

LANDSCAPE IN FOREST HILL—MEMPHIS

pictures; its quietness, its generous expanse, its orderly and careful keeping, its freedom from intrusion, its safe refuge for birds, its refreshing contrast to the city streets and excitements, its works of beautiful art and the ever-varying charms of nature. Even those who mourn are soothed and encouraged by their exalting suggestions. Formerly people visited the "graveyard" for mourning or curiosity. The old environment was unfavorable for a soul in need of being cheered or strengthened; but the thousands who can and do visit the parklike cemetery, whether they go because of their sentiments of sad duty, or for the purpose of general observation and interest, all receive bright impressions of harmony and beauty rather than of gloom and desolation. Beauty of nature, of landscape, inspirations of the sculptor's sublime and prophetic art, and ideals of immortal life beyond the silent grave in every tree and flower that blossoms in spring after the winter's rest!



LANDSCAPE—FOREST HILL, MEMPHIS

VIEWS IN FOREST HILL—MEMPHIS

IN FOREST HILL—MEMPHIS

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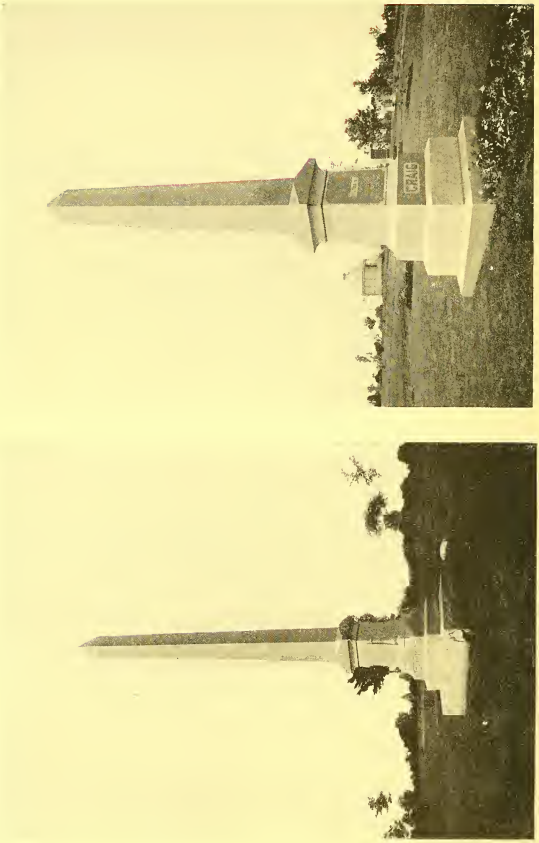

IN FOREST HILL CEMETERY—MEMPHIS

VIEWS IN FOREST HILL—MEMPHIS

"A solitude in which Nature sits like a friend."

FOREST HILL—MEMPHIS

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